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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000985

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FOR SECRETARY CLINTON AND GENERAL JONES FROM THE AMBASSADOR

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CVIS](#) [PL](#)

SUBJECT: REPAIRING U.S.-POLISH RELATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Ashe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) As I conclude my five years as U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Poland, I offer some final thoughts on how to put U.S.-Polish relations back on an upward trajectory after several weeks of bumps. It is worth the effort. The Poles are like family - not shy about pointing out perceived slights, but with us when we need them. They vote with us at the UN; they share intelligence from places where the U.S. flag does not fly; and their troops are fighting and dying in a U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan.

¶2. (C) The disappointed Polish reaction to the President's September 17 announcement on Missile Defense did not occur in a vacuum, nor is it mainly about Missile Defense. Poles, including many within the GOP, have long worried that their contributions to the cause of freedom and democracy in Europe, Iraq, and Afghanistan were under-appreciated. For the better part of the 20th century, U.S. presidents extolled the virtues of Polish patriots and freedom fighters, as well as the historic friendship -- and later alliance -- between Americans and Poles. More recently, the focus of our foreign policy has shifted from cooperation with the 27 individual EU member states to a transatlantic strategic partnership with the EU as a whole. Meanwhile, Poles worried they were slowly losing their "special standing" in American eyes -- even as Poland's standing and influence within the EU were on the rise.

¶3. (C) The events of the past week notwithstanding, few here dispute that Americans and Poles are united by common purpose and shared values. While cooperation on climate change, renewable energy, and banking/finance along the lines suggested in op-eds by Mark Brzezinski and others are certainly worth pursuing in the medium-term, there are steps we can -- and should -- take now to assure the average Pole that the U.S. has not abandoned Poland.

¶4. (C) First and foremost, Poles still hope for a permanent, significant U.S. military presence here as tangible reinforcement of NATO Article 5 security guarantees. Second, Poles want to see a meaningful expression of U.S. appreciation for Polish contributions. Finally, Poles still want to know that they will remain an important partner for the United States. Taking the following actions will send quick, meaningful signals that begin to address all three concerns, and make it likelier that Poland will continue to support U.S. interests:

-- PATRIOTS: A clear, public statement from the President or Secretary Gates that the U.S. will send live Patriot missiles to Poland following Polish ratification of a Supplemental Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). While we may feel we have been clear on this point, many Poles are still skeptical of U.S. intent.

-- PHASED, ADAPTIVE APPROACH: Likewise, we need a clear public statement that the U.S. hopes Poland will agree to host SM-3 interceptor missiles and that the resulting U.S. permanent presence will increase Polish security.

-- DON'T WAIT TO CONSULT: Consultations on the new MD approach and on strategic cooperation cannot wait until November, if we are to overcome the conventional wisdom here that there will be no MD in Poland. PM Tusk and FM Sikorski are reluctant to make firm commitments without detailed proposals. Nor should consultations be restricted to security issues, if we are to show we value Poles not just on the battle field. A high-level visit to Poland is appropriate -- it will not go unnoticed if there is no Cabinet level visit to Poland during the administration's first year in office.

-- COOPERATION IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE CAUCASUS: Poland has been a vocal advocate within the EU and NATO for drawing Ukraine, Georgia, and other Eastern neighboring countries closer to Western institutions. Poland has also played a prominent role in promoting democratization and human rights in Belarus. A high-level U.S. visit to Poland -- to mark the 20th anniversary of the collapse of communism in most of Europe -- could emphasize that the transformation process is not yet complete. We should reassert American intent to work with Poland and the EU to promote stability, democracy, human rights, and prosperity in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

-- VISA WAIVER PROGRAM: While prospects for Poland's admission to the Visa Waiver Program are still remote, a clear high-level statement that the Administration supports

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Poland's inclusion in VWP -- and is working with Poland to improve its prospects -- is essential.

-- POLAND'S 2011 EU PRESIDENCY: FM Sikorski has publicly indicated that Poland will focus during its EU presidency on two priorities -- strengthening trans-Atlantic relations and ESDP. As Poland plans for its presidency, now is the time to demonstrate interest and to step up strategic coordination. Poland shares U.S. views and welcomes our input on most, if not all, regional security issues we discuss with the EU, including nonproliferation, energy security, Russia, Afghanistan/Pakistan, Iran, and the Middle East.

-- CONSULTATIONS ON IRAN AND AFGHANISTAN: Most Poles, including GOP officials, do not perceive a threat from Iran -- they are focused on Russia. High-level briefings and shared U.S. intelligence assessments would help the GOP rethink its own assessments and give Polish officials greater confidence in educating the Polish public about the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran. On Afghanistan, the GoP recognizes the long-term threat to European stability, but the Polish public does not. The Poles want to share strategies on civil reconstruction and bolstering domestic public support.

-- EXCHANGE PROGRAMS: Since Poland joined the EU five years ago, literally thousands of Poles have benefited from various Union-sponsored training and exchange programs. The U.S. annual quota for similar programs in Poland is less than 50. We need to step up our investments in these influential, highly effective exchange programs.

¶4. (C) Initial steps along these lines would help to put the U.S.-Polish relationship back on track and open the door to closer cooperation on medium-term priorities. Poland has long been America's true friend and loyal ally. As its influence in the EU and NATO continue to grow, we must redouble our efforts to encourage Polish instincts on promoting international stability and strengthening trans-Atlantic strategic cooperation.

ASHE